

THE MOVING TARGET

By Alexander Cockburn & James Ridgeway

The Oswald Connections: Bad News for the CIA

Though already dismissed as a baseless rumor, the allegation that Jack Ruby is still alive and was given a new identity by the Central Intelligence Agency was not dreamed up by the veteran conspiracy buffs but was, in fact, advanced by a former employee of the agency itself. The Ruby story—to the effect that the CIA, in cooperation with the KGB, sponsored Ruby's murder of Oswald before the latter could disclose damning details of U.S.-Soviet intelligence links—has been put forward privately in recent weeks by Frank Snepp, formerly of the CIA. Snepp recently published *Deceit Interval*, a harsh denunciation of the CIA's conduct in the last days of the Vietnam war.

This allegation is surfacing just at a time when the CIA is mounting an ardent publicity campaign, signaled by cover stories in *Time* and *Newsweek*, to refurbish its woebegone image. The campaign comes shortly before the publication of a book which will probably do as much to discredit the CIA and other intelligence agencies as any disclosures of the last decade.

Edward Jay Epstein's book *Legend*, on Lee Harvey Oswald—and financed by the *Reader's Digest* to the tune of \$500,000—is scheduled to be published later this month. By all accounts, it is a devastating portrait of the CIA, particularly in its response to Oswald's assassination of President Kennedy. Contrary to a report in *New Times*, *Legend* does not contain anything about Ruby. *New Times*, armed with a sixth-hand report of Snepp's views, mistakenly ascribed them to Epstein. But directly quoting such former CIA executives as James Angleton as well as relying on extensive information from other CIA veterans, Epstein chronicles an intelligence organization so decrepit and so compromised that one of his CIA sources sent him a 50-page handwritten memorandum propounding, with names and vivid details, all the reasons why the CIA should be abolished forthwith. For good measure Epstein related the intimacy of other U.S. agencies with the Soviets, leading him to conclude that Hoover was gathering information for the Soviet Union—not as an act of espionage, but as part of regular, cooperative arrangements.

As he angrily denied last week that his book presented any new information about Jack Ruby, Epstein speculated that the CIA is already putting out "inoculation stories," as he phrased it, to discredit his own charges. His investigative mission has, indeed, not been without problems. His George de Mohrenschildt, the Russian friend of Marina Oswald living in Dallas, were broken off when de Mohrenschildt committed suicide in the brief interval when Epstein went for a bicycle ride on the grounds of his Florida hotel. While Epstein was conducting interviews with William Sullivan, a former high executive in the FBI, the latter had the misfortune to be mistaken for a deer and was shot dead in a hunting accident.

Central to Epstein's inquiry was his research on Lee Harvey Oswald's relationship with the Soviet Union and the KGB. This led him inevitably to Francis Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot. Epstein conducted a number of interviews with Powers, but on the eve of a meeting he had arranged between Powers and a former Marine in the same unit as Oswald, Powers was killed in a helicopter accident, in which his chopper mysteriously ran out of fuel and crashed near Los Angeles.

The Oswald-Powers connection, vital in assessing exactly how much work Oswald did for the Russians, runs roughly as follows. It is known that Oswald, in September of 1957, was a Marine assigned to Marine Air Control Squadron No. 1. This squadron was based at Atzugi, Japan, where its duties included radar scouting for incoming foreign aircraft. In the unit's equipment was special height-finding radar. Oswald, a trained radar operator, had access to this equipment.

Beginning in 1957, the U-2 spy aircraft which were making overflights across the Soviet Union on occasion took off and landed from Atzugi. (Although Powers denied to Epstein ever having been to Atzugi, Oswald's Marine colleagues clearly remembered encounters there between Powers and Oswald but Powers was killed before Epstein's arranged confrontation between the two could take place.)

Initially, the U-2 pilots overflying the



Edward J. Epstein: bombshells for the agency

Soviet Union on occasion took off and beyond the range of Soviet tracking systems, and that although the Soviets knew the flights were taking place they could do nothing about them. It was subsequently argued that if the Soviet Union were in possession of the technical radar information known to an operator such as Oswald, then it would have been in a position to knock out the U-2s.

Oswald was in Japan until November 1958, and was then returned to the United States where he was assigned to a Marine

Air Control Squadron at El Toro, California. In September 1959, he got a hardship discharge from the Marine Corps. In October he went to the Soviet Union where he told American consular officials that he had offered to tell the Russians everything he knew about the Marine Corps and his specialty—radar operations.

Oswald's familiarity with height-finding radar gear and radar radio codes are mentioned at various points in the Warren Commission investigation. Powers himself



NATIONAL ARCHIVE

Oswald returning from the USSR:
What did he tell them?



WIDE WORLD

Powers: What brought his U-2 down?

raises the question of Oswald's activities in his own book *Operation Overflight*. During the six months following [between October 31, 1959, embassy meeting [between Oswald and American consular officials in Moscow] there were only two overflights of the USSR: The one which occurred on April 9, 1960, was uneventful. The one which followed on May 1, 1960, wasn't. The May 1 flight was, of course, made by Powers, when he crashed.

The suggestion posed by Powers himself

is that Oswald gave the Soviet officials detailed technical information, which enabled them to shoot down the plane. And, indeed, CIA officials have subsequently claimed that what Oswald disclosed were details of the radar countermeasure beam emitted by the U-2 which would have thrown Soviet tracking devices off target. They suggest that once the Russians knew details of the counterbeam they used it to track their rocket up to the U-2 itself.

All of this is puzzling, for it seems clear

enough that the CIA knew, following Oswald's visit to the American embassy, what he was likely to have told the Russians. And, indeed, Richard Helms has told Edward Epstein that a CIA source in Soviet military intelligence also told the agency that the Russians had acquired the capability to shoot down a U-2. In which case why, on the eve of the summit between Eisenhower and Khrushchev, was Powers permitted to make such a hazardous mission?



Powers last year with the Helicopter in which he died.



There are, however, indications that the CIA may have been engaged in a cover-up of far more ludicrous inefficiency. We recently spoke with a former officer in the Air Force who, by reason of his intelligence duties, reported to the National Security Agency. At the time of the Powers flight, this officer was stationed in a U.S. listening post at Peshawar in north Pakistan. He was intimately involved in intelligence tracking of radio communications, monitoring Soviet rocket launchings and the like.

He recalled the U-2 flights and particularly the one made by Powers. He explained that the U.S. Buba Ber base just outside Peshawar had no airstrip and that the U-2—and indeed all planes—had to land and take off at the town's civil and military airstrip in the Reshawar Cantonment nearby. The U-2 used by Powers was stored the night before under a tarpaulin at the airstrip and was guarded only by the local Pakistani constabulary. The CIA, he recalls, seemed satisfied with this security.

Immediately following the news of Powers's descent in the Soviet Union there was a postmortem at the base. The officer maintains to us that it became common knowledge around the base that two Pakistani mechanics seen near the plane the night before the flight had been picked up by Pakistani police, and were later handed over to Pakistan military intelligence and executed for sabotage of the plane. Shortly thereafter, an East German woman, living in Deans Hotel in Peshawar, was arrested as the agent who had hired the Pakistani mechanics.

This woman was later taken to a border crossing on the frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan and exchanged for an Armenian agent working for U.S. intelligence who had penetrated the Soviet army. The exchange, the former Air Force officer says, was organized by the CIA. He can well recall the East German agent, a stocky 36-year-old woman with dyed blonde hair. His conclusion, and those of his colleagues at the base, was that the CIA, gravely embarrassed at the security fouls in Peshawar, had gone along with the missile story as a cover-up.

This account does not round with the stories put forward by Powers himself, by the CIA, or indeed by the Soviet Union. All Powers knew was that there was a flash and his plane went down. But the Soviets and the Americans—notably the CIA—had reason to cooperate in saying that it was a missile that had downed the plane: the Soviets exalting their missilery and the CIA avoiding unwelcome questions about their performance at Peshawar.

Part of Oswald's significance in history depends upon exactly what happened to the U-2—whether he, indeed, played a crucial role in aborting the Summit Conference of 1960 as well as in later assassinating the president of the United States. ■